

Hum Bake

Jesus Christ Beat



HOW MAY JESUS CHRIST  
BE MADE  
A REALITY TO ME

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## How May Jesus Christ be Made a Reality to Me?

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The world is impatient with unreality. The same is true of Christians and yet how much unreality there is among professing Christians. One is constantly meeting those who testify that the facts of their faith are unreal to them. A very common experience is to hear a Christian say that Christ is not real to him. He admits that his mother is very real to him. He says that now and then a stranger crosses his path who becomes a real factor or influence in his life, but he confesses that in no such sense or degree is Christ real to him. Now I maintain that it is possible and practicable for each Christian to have Christ become and remain a great reality in his life; to be conscious of His presence; to experience beyond doubt His actual help in breaking the power of temptation, in lifting the burden of sin, in shedding light in times of doubt on questions which perplex us, in affording a sense of companionship in times of sorrow or severe trial; to have Him become a vastly more potent factor in transforming

character and energizing life than any other person or persons living or dead. Christ thus becomes not merely One who lived and taught and wrought nearly two thousand years ago; not simply an inspiring memory or beneficent or historical character, for example, like Martin Luther or William the Silent; not some vague, impersonal influence; but

“ A living, bright reality,  
More dear, more intimately nigh,  
Than e'en the sweetest earthly tie.”

Many pray for such a sense of the presence and reality of Christ and for the peace, power, joy, faith, and hope which result from such a realizing sense of His presence; but it is overlooked that these are fruits or results. Let us rather concern ourselves with the causes which if supplied will necessarily lead to these much desired results. How then may Christ be made a great reality to me?

Christ becomes and remains real to one who continues the proper study of the records of the life and works and words of Christ. No personality becomes real unless one has knowledge of that personality. My friend is real to me. A characteristic of friendship is confidence. Confidence depends on knowledge. If Christ is to be real to us we must have confidence in His character, life and power. Such confidence originates and develops with growing

knowledge of Him. Have you ever known a man maintaining a vivid realization of the nearness of Christ who was not continuing to study Christ and meditate upon Him? General "Chinese" Gordon to a remarkable degree preserved a vital faith in Christ and seemed to live in His presence. But he was a constant student of the Scriptures. At some periods in his life, and they were the periods when Christ seemed to dominate him most, he studied the Bible from seven o'clock in the morning until eleven and often until the noon hour. One time I had the opportunity of viewing in the apartments of the Queen at Windsor Castle her wonderful collection of gifts. Among them none impressed me more than the old Bible of "Chinese" Gordon that had been brought back from the Sudan. Many of the pages were so worn that you could scarcely read the print. Recently, in reading the published letters of Gordon to his sister, I noted these words, "During the barren times I read (the Bible) a great deal." There were many references in his letters showing that this was a general practice with him under such circumstances. In other words, when the grasp of his faith seemed to be weakening, when Christ seemed to be receding, he would give himself to earnest study of the Scriptures and Christ would again become a reality to him.

What should characterize our study of

Christ if He is to remain real to us? Without doubt our study should be thorough. If certain Christians gave no more time and no more earnest and thorough attention to the consideration of other personalities and enterprises than they are giving to Christ and the interests of His kingdom, those other personalities and enterprises would become practically meaningless to them and powerless as an influence over them. Our study of Christ must be reverent. It is said that "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him." The more one dwells upon it the more he sees that much of this secret depends on knowledge revealed in the pathway of the prayerful and sympathetic study of Christ and His teachings. It should be emphasized that our study of Christ must be continuous. Only in this way will Christ be kept vivid and real before us. His character is infinite, His riches are unsearchable; as an object of study He Himself is inexhaustible. The Christian who assumes that because he at one time in his life spent several years in the study of Christ, therefore he does not need to continue to exercise his mind upon Christ in order to keep Him real in his thought and experience, will soon discover that he is mistaken. Psychologically and experimentally it is true that the mind must continue to occupy itself with Christ if Christ is to continue as a dominating reality in one's life. No argument is needed



to show that the study of Christ must be carried on with the controlling motive and purpose to know Christ in order that we may become more and more like Him.

If we would have Christ become and remain real to us, we must obey Him and seek to conform our lives to His example. Beyond a shadow of doubt a right life, or rather a dominant desire to live a right life, is indispensable to the realization of the nearness of Christ. "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord"—that is, to whom shall He be real? "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart." A man with defiled hands or impure heart does not know Jesus Christ as a reality. Listen once more to that voice of a faraway time, "Who shall dwell in thy holy hill"—that is, to whom shall the reality of Thy presence be a constant experience? "He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart." The man with the consuming ambition to align his inner and outer life with the example of Christ finds himself ever in the presence of Christ. Or take Christ's own words, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." By purity of heart much more is meant than we usually associate with the word purity. It means not only having the heart free from lasciviousness, or what we commonly think of as impurity, but also free from pride, envy, jealousy, deceit, uncharitableness, distrust of

God. As one grows pure in heart in this comprehensive sense, his vision of Christ grows clearer and his sense of communion with Him becomes deeper.

This matter of obedience to Christ means absolute surrender to His will and reign. We must yield ourselves unconditionally and completely. It consists, as a French writer so well expresses it, in the "heart renunciation of everything which we are sensible does not lead to God." Well may we dwell on this phrase. If any one who has hitherto had an unsatisfactory Christian experience would resolve to renounce not simply nominally, but from the heart, every practice, indulgence, attitude, and motive that he finds in experience, or in the teaching of the Christian Scriptures, does not lead to God, Christ would become increasingly a great reality to him. We cannot be too thorough at this point. Some people think they have surrendered all when they have not done so. One time St. Augustine caught himself praying, "O Lord, give me purity, but not yet." And so some Christians are saying: Lord, give me unselfishness, but let me have my own way in this thing; or, Lord, give me humility, but do not make it necessary for me to come down from a certain position I have taken already before others; or, Lord, give me purity, but let a certain picture still hang in the chambers of my imagery. If we have a thousand things

and give up nine hundred and ninety-nine of them to Christ, but still hold on to one, Christ will not be real to us. He is the Lord of all or not Lord at all. He requires everything of us, and not until we make a complete surrender does He disclose Himself to us fully. The more we identify ourselves with His aims, desires and ideals, the nearer and more real He will seem to us.

By preserving an uncompromising attitude toward sin Christ becomes and remains real to us. Sin is a veil; no man ever saw Christ through it. Sin is an insulator; it completely cuts a man off from Jesus Christ. The Old Testament language is apt and true, "Your sins have separated you from God." No man ever regarded sin with favor, or even with indifference, and at the same time kept a realizing sense of the nearness of Christ.

We need to guard against the little breaks in our friendly union with Christ. A very little thing may keep turned off a mighty current. The so-called little sins are deadly. We should never think a sin too small to be cast behind the back of Christ. We should preserve at all costs our sensitiveness to sin. There is no truer test of growing spirituality than growing sensitiveness to the approaches of sin. On the other hand there is no more alarming condition than one of callousness to the presence and working of sin. We should confess and forsake a sin as soon as

it is recognized. This was the practice of Robert Murray McCheyne, one of the saintliest characters of Scotland. He said: "I ought to confess sin the moment I see it to be a sin; whether I am in company, or in study or even in preaching, the soul ought to cast a glance of abhorrence at the sin. If I go on with the duty, leaving the sin unconfessed, I go on with a burdened conscience and add sin to sin." The godliest men I have known, or those of whom I have read, never relaxed their vigilance in self-examination to detect promptly and overcome earnestly all approaches of sin.

Christ becomes and remains real to one who persists in the cultivation of the habit of reminding one's self of His presence. It will take perseverance to acquire this habit, but well may we pay any price to do so. Christ is present whether we are conscious of the fact or not; whether we believe it or not. He is at hand, closer than breathing. The sufficient proof is that others who have complied with His conditions have found Him near at hand and become conscious of His presence and help. Well may one act, therefore, on the supposition that Christ is near.

There are marked advantages of reminding one's self of Christ's presence. It warns one of approaching evil in time to resist it. It develops hatred of sin. It promotes heart purity. It gives one a keener sense of

duty. It greatly strengthens faith and imparts the sense of certainty of help. It exerts an ennobling and inspiring influence.

How shall the habit of reminding one's self of Christ's presence be cultivated? One means is that of regular, daily occasions for secret prayer. Even though Christ does not seem to be near us when we pray it is well to go on praying, for in time His presence will be manifested. I need not enlarge upon the desirability of devoting some of the best hours under the most favorable conditions to prayer. Keeping the attention fixed on Christ when others are praying is also an invaluable help in acquiring this habit of realizing His presence. A right use of the Holy Communion is indispensable, for the distinguishing reason which Christ assigned for this observance was to remind His followers of His work on their behalf and of His presence. It is well also frequently to reflect upon the fact that Christ is looking upon us. Another suggestive practice is that of associating thoughts of Christ with certain places, or hours, or circumstances. I have one friend who in coming to his office in New York each day, as the train shoots into the tunnel before reaching Jersey City, lets this remind him of Christ and who then gives himself to prayer and communion. All will remember the familiar picture of the Angelus in which the two peasants in the field

are in the act of prayer, having been reminded by the bell in the distant church tower. Bishop Andrews had certain trains of thought suggested to his mind when the clock struck the different hours. Let us not look lightly upon such suggestions nor regard them as purely mechanical. By the wise use of these and other means we may have the laws of psychology fighting for us in promoting the formation of a valuable habit. A most important suggestion is that we let the approach of temptation remind us instantly of Christ. This may be made one of the most powerful means if we do not trifle with the warnings. If we fail to heed them the conscience will be disabled so that it will not remind us so well in times of greatest peril. Therefore each time when one is tempted to be mean, or selfish, or vain, or jealous, let the very temptation remind him of the presence of Christ. In one of the battles in the recent war in Manchuria the Japanese captured certain Russian guns and brought them into action against the enemy in the same battle. Thus we may make the occasions for stumbling sources of strength in that they will remind us of the nearness of the triumphant Christ. The growing reality and influence of Christ's presence depend largely upon the operation of the law of association, and the various hints which have been given are valuable as a means of bringing this law more fully into

play. They thus afford opportunities for Christ to impress Himself upon us.

We can all think of examples of men who have practiced the presence of Christ. Nicholas Hermann, who lived in the seventeenth century, cultivated this habit to a high degree. He it was who voiced the great truth, "He is within us; seek Him not elsewhere." He testified that when the appointed hours of prayer were passed, it made no difference in his case because he still continued with God; and that he did not ask for times of retirement because the greatest business did not divert him from God. He expressed the fundamental truth which, when once grasped and obeyed, transforms life, "our sanctification does not depend upon changing our works, but in doing these for God's sake which we commonly do for our own." It is not strange, therefore, that this man was able at last to say, "I am come to a state, wherein it would be as difficult for me not to think of God, as it was at first to accustom myself to it." Henry Martyn justly acquired the reputation of being a true saint. In his early life he had a fiery temper which had not been brought into subjection. He was a brilliant student and a man of marked social gifts and had the temptations which assail one who possesses such talents. But whether at Cambridge University, or later in India, or Persia, on land or on sea, wherever and

under whatever circumstances one met him, one was reminded of the presence of Christ with him. The secret of it all is found in this sentence from his diary, "My chief enjoyment was the enjoyment of God's presence."

Stonewall Jackson had also acquired this habit of reminding himself of the presence of Christ. He literally carried the saintliness of the cloister into the turmoil of the camp. He began each day with an unhurried time of Bible study and secret prayer. It is said he prayed without ceasing while under fire as well as in camp. His biographer points out that he had long cultivated the habit of "connecting the most trivial and customary acts of life with silent prayer"; and as a result he developed an almost startling consciousness of the nearness and reality of the invisible world. David, too, was not a stranger to this habit, for he was able to say, "the Lord is at my right hand"; and again, "I have set the Lord continually before me"; and still again, "mine eyes are ever unto the Lord."

By associating with those to whom Christ is a great reality He may be made more real to us. There are persons whose lives and presence, as well as words, make an atmosphere in which it is much easier to realize Christ and to apprehend His teachings. I recall with gratitude one godly aged woman who thus exerted a great in-



fluence upon me at a time when my faith was sorely strained by certain studies in philosophy. The simplicity and genuineness of her faith and life constituted in itself a fact for which I had to account. Moreover, the presence of Christ seemed to be as actual and real to her as that of any person in the room. This also was a fact which I had to explain. The fact that she, as a result of complying with the conditions of Christ, had found Him so real could not be off-set by my lack of experience of this reality, for I had not in like manner complied with His conditions. I first met the present Bishop of Durham when he was Principal of Ridley Hall, Cambridge. I was profoundly impressed by his evident consciousness of the nearness of Christ. The practical way in which this experience and belief influenced his conduct and character also helped me greatly in a time of real stress and strain. We should associate not only with living Christians who know Christ at first hand, but also with those who in other times have lived near to Him. Henry Martyn was profoundly influenced for Christ by reading the Memoirs of David Brainerd. One side of my library is given up to biographies. Whenever my faith becomes dim and the great facts of Christ and His mission become unreal to me, I need only take down and read for a short time such works as Rutherford's Letters, Lance-

lot Andrewes and His Private Devotions. or Halyburton's Autobiography to have Christ brought near and His truth afresh get strong hold upon me. We miss a great source of inspiration when we neglect spending much time with the holy men of other days.

“ Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine !  
We feebly struggle, they in glory shine ;  
Yet all are one in Thee, for all are Thine.  
Alleluia !”

By serving men, especially those in need, Christ may be made more real. Friendship must have expression if it is to be maintained and grow. Unselfishly serving men for the sake of Christ affords the best expression of our friendship for Him. Those for whom we sacrifice most become most real to us. Moreover, Christ very clearly teaches that one of the best ways to get into His presence is to minister to those in need. “ I was an hungered, and ye gave me meat : I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink : I was a stranger and ye took me in : naked and ye clothed me : I was sick, and ye visited me : I was in prison, and ye came unto me.” The disciples did not understand what He meant and answered in response : “ Lord, when saw we thee an hungered, and fed thee ? or athirst, and gave thee drink ? And when saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in ? or naked, and clothed thee ? And when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and

came unto thee?" Notice Christ's answer, "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me." There was a time in my undergraduate life when I did not believe in the deity of Jesus Christ. Two things led me out of my unbelief. One was the study of the resurrection, the other was my experience in seeking to help sinful men. A friend and fellow student urged me to join him in a religious and philanthropic enterprise to help the prisoners in the county jail. To this man Christ was a reality; to me He was simply a good and great man. As I attempted to help those prisoners behind the bars, and also, after they were released as I tried to obtain business positions for them, and to effect reconciliations between them and their relatives, and as I sought to prepare them to face their old temptations, I myself found Jesus Christ the Lord. I do not at this time attempt to explain it. I do not know that I could were I to try; but I know beyond question that it was a real fact and experience with me. Moreover, I have met other men who have become wearied with their much study and reflection and speculation upon different points of the Christian faith, who, escaping into the service of needy men, have found the same divine Lord. Let us not forget that we can serve or help men by intercessory prayer as well as by other forms of

work. Only the other day I was reading in a letter of David Hill, one of the most spiritual missionaries who has ever labored in China, these words, "I have lately felt great nearness to God in pleading for the salvation of souls here." I suppose the reason why he experienced this nearness to God and the reason why others who give themselves to unselfish intercession come to realize so vividly the presence of Christ, is that they thus occupy themselves with that which still occupies Christ, the great Intercessor Himself, for He ever liveth to make intercession. By uniting, therefore, in doing what He is doing, as well as by entering into direct communion with Him, we become conscious of the reality of His presence.

Christ becomes and remains real to us when we avail ourselves of the help of the great Helper in the process of making real His presence. The help of the Holy Spirit is necessary if one is to apprehend and understand Christ. On the authority of Christ Himself the great work of the Holy Spirit is to take of the things of Christ and show them unto us. True it is that "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit also is the source of the love that we bear to Christ; for He sheds abroad in the heart the love of God. In other words He makes Christ seem near. Any person whom one loves does not seem

far away, for love annihilates space and all barriers. The Holy Spirit gives visions of Christ. This He can accomplish under the most adverse and difficult circumstances, as, for example, in the case of Stephen when he was being stoned to death. But nothing brings Christ nearer than the work of His Spirit in giving one victory day by day in the battles with temptation within and with the forces of evil outside. These fresh, living demonstrations of the presence and working of superhuman power constitute the most convincing and indubitable evidence of the reality of Christ and of His nearness.

“And not for signs in Heaven above,  
Or earth beneath they look,  
Who know with John, His smile of love,  
With Peter, His rebuke.

“In joy of inward peace, or sense  
Of sorrow over sin  
He is His own best evidence ;  
His witness is within.”

Christ becomes increasingly real to the man who forms the undiscourageable resolution to make Him a reality. It is at this point that we do well to be much in earnest. Few men have lived lives as conscious of the presence of Christ as did McCheyne. One has let us into the secret of his experience by pointing out that “he aimed at enjoying God all the day.” Observe that it was a constant and not an intermittent ex-

perience which he had as his object. And notice, what is even more important, he had this great object as a definite aim. A deputation waited on Ruysboeck, the Belgian monk, to learn the secret of his holiness. His answer is significant, "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy." It would be well for us to test the sincerity of our desire to have Christ become and remain real to us, by examining ourselves with a few questions which will gather up the dominant ideas on which we have been dwelling. Have I resolved that I will continue to study the life and works and words of Christ? "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy." Have I resolved that I will obey Christ in all things and that I will seek to conform my life to His example? "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy." Have I resolved that I will preserve an uncompromising attitude toward sin in all forms and all degrees, even toward so-called little sins? "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy." Have I resolved that I will persist (that is, not become discouraged) in the cultivation of the habit of reminding myself of the presence of Christ? Beyond question "ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy." Have I resolved that I will associate more intimately with those men of God to whom Christ is a great reality? "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy." Have I resolved that I will serve men, especially those

in need, cost what it may? "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy,"—no more, no less. Have I resolved that I will avail myself of the ever present Helper in the vital process of making Christ real to me? "Ye are as holy as ye truly will to be holy,"—that is, ye are as holy as ye truly resolve, determine, make up your mind to be holy.

In seeking to observe and practice all the things which have been emphasized in order to make the wonderful Christ more real, it is an infinite satisfaction for us to recall that we are not groping in the dark for someone who is trying to elude us; that Christ is not dodging and seeking to hide from us; but that He is more eager to break in upon us and reveal Himself more fully to us than we are to have Him. Therefore, as we travel the paths which have been indicated we will find as did the two on the way to Emmaus, that He is with us; yet unlike them our eyes will not be holden, for we shall recognize His presence and continue with Him until we pass into the great City where we shall become like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

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